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ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 081031Z MAY 09
FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6491
INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 7634
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 3379
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 6333
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 1721
RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN 1328
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEIDN/DNI WASHINGTON DC
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 7986
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 8297
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RUMICEA/USCENTCOM INTEL CEN MACDILL AFB FL

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 NEW DELHI 000933

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [KDEM](#) [IN](#)

SUBJECT: BHARAT BALLOT 09: BATTLEFIELD BULANDSHAHR -- TAKE
THREE

REF: A. NEW DELHI 800

[1](#)B. NEW DELHI 710

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: This is the third in a series of cables on Bulandshahr, a rural market town of 175,000 two hours southeast of Delhi in the state of Uttar Pradesh. On May 5th, two days before its parliamentary district went to the polls, PolOff and PolFSN ventured back to Bulandshahr to see how preparations for the election were going. The goal for this trip was to solicit the political views of the aam admi, the common man, vice the elites, so we stopped to talk to different groups of people in tea houses, motorcycle shops, and at farmhouses in the outskirts of town. Our interlocutors consistently based their political choices upon consideration of their caste or religious community. Despite that, everyone said there was no social tension surrounding the upcoming polling. Another oft-heard message was that after two years of rule, the bloom had definitely fallen off of Chief Minister Mayawati's rose in Bulandshahr as a result of her cutting off previously established funding for the poor.

Into the Heartland

[1](#)2. (U) As PolOff and PolFSN left the outskirts of Delhi and started on the two-lane road that would lead us to Bulandshahr, in a few short miles we left behind the wide avenues of Lutyen's capital and its accompanying suburban sprawl and entered the Indian countryside, dotted with roadside villages, the occasional mango orchard, and tidy rectangles of sugar cane, wheat, and vegetables. These villages mostly consist of flat-roofed brick houses, sometimes only one room deep and a few rooms wide, often with a corrugated tin roof over a bit of porch and a patch of dirt in the front with one or two cows or water buffalo tied up nearby. Storefronts are shallow brick structures with roll-up doors or small wooden lean-tos where one can get a cup of tea or sundries to nibble on. With wood for cooking and heating scarce, dried cow dung is the fuel of choice. Many farming families build up large squared-off smooth-walled solid structures made of dung, often five or more feet in height, around four feet across, and four feet deep, shaped like small shacks complete with steeply pitched roofs. They often thatch the roofs and sides to better protect the structures from erosion during the monsoon. Sometimes several of these structures will be co-located,

resembling a small group of huts several feet from the road, waiting until they are needed.

13. (U) We reached Bulandshahr a little after 9:00 am and followed a stream of fruit and vegetable vendors pushing their two-wheeled wooden carts piled with oranges, bananas, cucumbers, and the like into town where they would set up for business for the day alongside the main road. Getting to Bulandshahr was made more difficult by the many horse- and water buffalo- drawn carts pulling bulging loads, measuring 10-12 feet high and just as wide, of recently harvested cattle fodder. In town, the streets were bustling with auto-rickshaws, horse carts, buses, motorcycles, cars, and water buffalo galore. Although there was commercial advertising on nearly every visible wall and storefront, there was next to no political advertising, showing how much the local branches of the main political parties fear the Election Commission's funding limits for campaign materials like banners and posters.

14. (U) When asked about the election atmosphere, everyone said there was no communal, religious, or other social tension. No one reported any of the parties trying to buy their vote either. Most seemed happy to talk to us candidly about the elections. Many of the roadside tea houses comprise two or three rickety wooden benches under a shade tree, a small charcoal burner to heat water and milk for the tea, and a tiny wooden shack to hold the wares of the merchant. These have a primarily male clientele, so in an attempt to find some women voters to talk to, we stopped at a Public

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Distribution System (PDS) outlet where a group of about ten to fifteen women were waiting to get oil and grain rations. No one would speak to us there though, with one old lady brushing us off with a "we'll vote for whoever we like."

A Case of Groupthink

15. (SBU) A few themes came up again and again in our discussions. Most Hindus will vote for the candidate that their caste supports. The Muslim vote thus far seemed to be split among the Congress party, the Samajwadi Party (SP), and the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), and will serve as the swing vote in this election. One group of Muslim voters said that they were fine with the SP joining hands with Kalyan Singh, the Bharatiya Janata Party chief minister of Uttar Pradesh in 1992 when the Babri Masjid (mosque) was destroyed by Hindu nationalists. Our interlocutors assessed that because Singh is from the district, he would bring his caste group's votes along with him and thus help defeat the BJP candidate. Some Muslim villagers visiting town told us that their respective villages would vote as units, but their village leaders had not yet decided which party they should support. Our interlocutors only talked about local issues; they showed no interest in national issues such as security, terrorism, or foreign relations.

No More Mayawati

16. (SBU) Although we did run across a few BSP supporters, many of the poor farmers and townspeople we talked to said that after two years they were sick of Mayawati because she had done nothing for them. Instead, she had taken away the benefits that SP leader Mulayam Singh Yadav had bestowed during his previous stint as chief minister, such as 20,000 rupees for poor girls who graduated from the 12th grade, the same amount to poor girls getting married, and a stipend of 300 rupees a month to old age pensioners. One teahouse philosopher said that in Bulandshahr, might and money make right and that the division between the haves and the have nots was growing.

Getting Pumped Up For the Election

17. (U) A few days prior to our visit, both Mulayam Singh

Yadav and Mayawati had held rallies in town. The general consensus seemed to be that Yadav's rally was bigger than Mayawati's, and that both rallies had been attended by people bused in from outside of town, but no one gave us specific numbers of attendees. When asked if they received any sort of benefit -- money or lunch -- for attending the rallies, everybody gave a negative answer. One respondent laughed, saying all they got were speeches, nothing else. They didn't even get to see a film star, unlike the SP rallies held in some other towns. The respondents did not miss the banners and posters used in previous elections. They felt they didn't need such symbols because they knew the candidates and their credentials, the primary one being their caste. A group of young men outside a motorcycle repair shop were looking forward to voting in their first election, although one had yet to receive his voter registration card. The owner of a small fleet of sound trucks, which are often used to broadcast political or religious messages, said the prices he was able to charge had not gone up as a result of the election campaign; in fact, sound truck rental rates had actually dropped recently.

Congress Party Working To Get Out The Vote

18. (SBU) Along one of the main thoroughfares that radiate from a central roundabout, we found the Congress party campaign headquarters. A throng of people were milling about, getting ready to go out and canvass neighborhoods on the last official day of campaigning. They gave us samples of the flyers they were using, one with a picture of Congress party President Sonia Gandhi and the local candidate, Devi Dayal, a

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former Indian Administrative Service official and Petroleum Secretary. Another showed Dayal with Congress party General Secretary Rahul Gandhi. (Note: We met Dayal the first time we visited Bulandshahr; he was a thoughtful candidate who believed then he would win with the votes of secular and educated voters.) The party workers were a mix of young and old, male and female, with some of the women wearing burkas. They said they would go by car, motorcycle, and on foot to talk to people. Some of them practiced their pitch on us, regaling us with the qualifications of their educated candidate with many years of experience in the central government who would bring development to the area, in contrast to some of the other parties' candidates who had not finished high school, drank, and gambled.

College Turned Camp Site for Election Workers

9. (SBU) With the intention of talking to a few students at a local college, we discovered one of several Election Commission-sponsored bivouac sites for its poll workers and security forces in the Bulandshahr district; this one was housing 1100 people. (Note: The Election Commission itself has a comparatively small permanent staff. In order to carry out the Indian elections, which involve polling at over 800,000 polling places, Indian civil servants below the top ranks are subject to being called for election duty.) One of the officials gave PolOff and PolFSN a tour of two large courtyards, where the men were living in spartan conditions, cooking, napping on thin pallets on the college's porches, and using communal taps to wash themselves and their clothes. They had come in on several buses and we saw a field of jeeps waiting to help them carry out their duties. Our guide told us that they had come from Basti in the eastern part of Uttar Pradesh, and they had worked the previous phases of the election in other parts of the state. The poll workers and guards had all received their polling station assignments and would leave the next day to set up at their designated locations.

110. (SBU) Comment: It was clear to Poloff that there was no uncertainty among Bulandshahr's voters. They knew how they would cast their votes and it would be based on caste/religioun calculations. Even the group of Muslim voters

who said they had not yet decided who they would vote for knew that their vote would be based on identity politics. This third trip to Bulandshahr to talk to the average voter showed how thoroughly caste politics permeates the society, as well as the cynicism that goes along with it. The reason often given for voting with one's caste is that that candidate was the least likely to do something bad to the group later. Although some of our interlocutors said they were excited about the election, it was not clear to PolOff why that was the case, given the lack of hope they displayed that the circumstances of Bulandshahr's average citizens would be bettered as a result of the election.

BURLEIGH